

A Rice - Ceremony.

BY R. O. WINSTEDT.

In his account of rice-ceremonies in *J. R. A. S.* No. 29, p. 8, 1896, Mr. C. O. Blagden, writes:—"at planting there are also ceremonies. Sometimes there is a special service known as *bāpua*, consisting of a sort of mock combat, in which the evil spirits are believed to be expelled from the rice-fields by the villagers: this is not done every year, but once in three or four years." He remarks that *bāpua* is the Minangkabau pronunciation of *bērpuar* and that *puar* is a plant, whose stem is used in the mock-combat. Mr. Skeat quotes this on p. 250 of *Malay Magic*; in Selangor, he adds, this mock-combat is called *singketa*.

Two years ago, I saw this combat take place at Johol. Two parties assembled one on each side of a gully and hurled the *puar* rods across at one another, till a blow in the face gave one of the combatants a bloody mouth and spoilt the fun. It lasted about half an hour. The rods or darts were about $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet long, thin green and straight, and the pared root gave them a flat end like that of a stethoscope: it was this flat end which was thrown foremost. It has been suggested to me that they are stems of a ginger-plant. A *pawang* opened the proceedings with an invocation. The purpose was to expel all evil influences from the fields before planting. I was informed that *singketa* is a more serious combat with heavier weapons—*batang pisang*, if I remember rightly.